



THE CRIME OF THE BROKER'S OFFICE.

He staggered across the cell, and sank down upon an iron cot.

Deliberately the detective unfolded the confession, and in a slow, distinct voice he read it.

Kredge did not interrupt him. When the detective concluded the reading of the confession, which virtually accused the janitor, the latter did not utter a word, but white and ghastly, he stood at the door as though stricken dumb and motionless.

"What do you say to that, Levi?" asked Paxton, presently.

It was a moment before Kredge answered.

CHAPTER XXXII.—(Continued.) Then he and Benjamin talked over their plans for a long time, and before the money-lender laid a plan had been arranged whereby Stanmore, as well as continue to designate him, hoped to attain the fruition of his hope, and get Pratt and Weeks in his power.

What Stanmore's plan was we shall presently see.

Meanwhile, on the evening which witnessed the interview between Stanmore and Abraham Benjamin, when the latter told his friend of Pratt's proposition about the marked money, Paxton received a note from the Chief of Police, requesting him to call at his office at once.

The detective hastened to comply with the request, and when he arrived at the chief's office, he was informed by that official that he had just received notice that a man who was dying at a charity hospital desired to make a confession to him relating to the Oakburn murder.

"I knew you would be deeply interested in anything promising information on this subject, and so I sent for you. Will you accompany me to the hospital? I am going at once," said the chief.

Of course Paxton answered affirmatively.

The detective and the chief repaired to the hospital without further delay.

Upon their arrival there they were at once conducted to the ward in which lay the dying man who wished to make confession.

Intensely interested and excited at the prospect of an immediate explanation of the mystery which had so long baffled him, Paxton listened to the confession made by the dying man, while a clerk of the hospital recorded it in writing.

"I know Levi Kredge, who was the janitor at the office of Jason Garrison, where John Oakburn, the old cashier, was murdered," began the man.

Paxton started as he heard him mention the name of the janitor at the very outset.

"On the night of the murder," continued the man who was making the confession, "at about 1 o'clock, I saw Levi Kredge get out of the side window of Garrison's office. I had dodged into the passage between the two buildings to escape the observation of a party whom I wished to avoid, when I saw Levi. I accosted Levi when he came out of the passage upon the street. I told him I had seen him get out of the office, and he was terribly alarmed."

"On the dying man's face, and after a few moments he continued:

"Kredge begged me not to tell of his being in the office, and he offered me a thousand dollars if I would swear to keep his secret. I agreed, for I am a poor man, and a thousand dollars seemed like a large sum to me. Until now I have kept my promise of secrecy, but I could not make up my mind to die without telling this to I feared that you young Harland might get convicted of the crime. It is my conviction that Levi Kredge murdered John Oakburn."

"This was the man's confession, and when it had been read to him he was lifted up in his couch, and he signed it. Of course Paxton was not in the least surprised to learn that Kredge was in Garrison's office on the night of the murder, for he had, as we know, long since concluded that the janitor made the tell-tale tracks under the office window.

It puzzled the detective to decide what part the man whom Pratt & Weeks called "Garnar" had in the crime. Whether he was principal or confederate he could not say.

Paxton informed Stanmore and Stuart Harland of the confession, and their satisfaction at the news may be imagined.

"I had faith to believe that my innocence would be proven," said Stuart.

"Now should Judith Kredge accuse Marion publicly, her denunciation will be harmless, since we may regard the proof against Kredge sufficient to convince any jury," said Stanmore, who thought only of his own safety.

"With the confession in the man whom he bribed to secrecy in my possession, I shall visit Levi Kredge, and I think this time I shall be able to frighten him into a confession," said Paxton.

The detective reasoned from what he knew of the character of Levi Kredge, that if he was not the principal in the crime of the broker's office, he would now see that there was no hope for him, and he would try to save himself by turning state's evidence.

Paxton had the confession of the man who had seen Kredge leave the broker's office through the window in his pocket, and he forthwith repaired to the Tombs, and was admitted to Kredge's cell.

The janitor seemed surprised at Paxton's visit, and he scented danger.

"Well, Levi, here I am again, you see, and I have a little surprise for you," said the detective cheerfully.

"What now? Has not Judith's confession convinced you of my innocence of Oakburn's murder?" demanded Kredge.

Janam present in the private office, and the villainous broker said, without fear of being overheard by the others.

"I have brought the marked money with me. I want to close this transaction to-day, if possible."

Then he produced a package from a small valise, and opening it, disclosed several bundles of bank notes.

Benjamin watched them eagerly, and his eyes flamed with the light of triumph as Pratt proceeded to count the money upon the table.

"You will find the amount all right, I think," he said, after running over the bills, and he pushed them to Benjamin.

The aged Hebrew counted the money carefully.

"The amount is correct. Seventy-seven thousand dollars."

The reader will remember that one thousand dollars, according to Pratt's statement, had been paid to the mysterious man called "Garnar."

Benjamin, after counting the money, snatched it up, and placed it in his safe.

Then, instead of taking out the gold to pay Pratt, he suddenly locked the safe and turned away.

Pratt's eyes were riveted upon him, and he did not understand the meaning of this.

"I thought you said the gold was in the safe yonder," he said.

"So it is. But before paying it to you, I want you to sign this little document, merely as a matter of business and self-protection, in case anything unpleasant should happen."

Pratt uttered an impatient oath, as the old money-lender placed a written paper before him.

"I have this day deposited with Benjamin & Son, seventy-seven thousand dollars in bills, marked with a red 'V' in the corner of Oakburn's check, as delivered by me to Benjamin and Company in pursuance of an agreement whereby Benjamin is to loan me thirty-seven thousand five hundred dollars, and hold this money as security for the same."

Pratt read the paper carefully.

Then he said:

"Very well, I'll sign this for you," and seizing the pen, he appended his signature in a dashing hand.

"Now, then, give me the gold."

"One moment, please."

"What now?" demanded Pratt, with an impatient oath.

"I want to introduce you to these gentlemen," said the money-lender.

There was a screen across the office, and, pushing it aside, he added:

"These are my witnesses!"

Pratt recoiled with a sudden exclamation, as he beheld another Benjamin, the exact counterpart of the man to whom he had paid the marked money, and four of Benjamin's clerks, who had been concealed behind the screen.

Pratt glanced in amazement from the man to whom he had paid the marked money, to the other Benjamin.

"What infernal trickery is this? If you have betrayed me, I'll have your life, turning to the Benjamin to whom he had given the marked money.

"Who are you?" continued Pratt, advancing threateningly.

"Stand back!" shouted the other.

As he spoke, he suddenly removed a beard and wig, which he had worn to impersonate Benjamin, and Paxton, the detective, stood revealed.

At Stanmore's request the veteran had assumed the character of Benjamin the money-lender.

"Paxton, O detective!" exclaimed Pratt, and a gray pallor supplemented the habitual flush of his red face.

wittingly helped to ruin others, was a swindle, I will spare you," said Stanmore.

Pratt was silent for a moment, while bitter reflection filled his plotting brain.

"Come, your answer. Will you make terms or go to prison?"

Just then Pratt heard a peculiar "clicking" sound, and turning to Paxton he saw the detective snapping the catch of a pair of handcuffs which he had taken from his pocket.

The sight of those manacles was very suggestive, and Pratt realized his situation more fully than heretofore.

He uttered a terrible oath, and then exclaimed bitterly:

"The game is up. I cave. You've got the upper hand this time, and I'll do what you require."

Stanmore's eyes sparkled, for this was a supreme moment of his life. The time of his vindication had come at last.

"You are wise to so decide," he said.

"Very wise," remarked Paxton, sotto voce. And he returned the handcuffs to his pocket.

Pratt was conquered.

"Now tell us how you came by the marked money?" demanded Stanmore.

"That money was not stolen from John Oakburn. It was not taken from Garrison's safe, as you might suppose. On the contrary, it was paid to me by John Oakburn on the evening of the day he drew it from the bank," said Pratt.

"What! Do you mean to say John Oakburn embezzled the money? He was an honest man, you shall not reduce his reputation!" cried Stanmore, indignantly.

"I have told you nothing but the truth."

"But John Oakburn did not owe you this money?"

Pratt hesitated.

Evidently it was hard for the scoundrel to acknowledge his villainy.

Paxton now anticipated the most surprising denouement, but at that moment there came a knock at the office door, and opening it the detective admitted one of his most expert agents.

From the beginning of the investigation of John Oakburn's murder, this man had devoted himself, under his principal's direction, exclusively to the task of seeking the man who had exchanged overcoats with Stuart Harland on the railway train.

The detective auxiliary whispered to his employer for a moment, and then Paxton cried:

"I've great news. The suspected man called 'Garnar,' who exchanged coats with Stuart Harland, has been captured. This agent of mine secured him at Mother Kitt's house."

"Garnar, our old friend?"

"Ah, you know the supposed assassin!" said Stanmore, significantly.

"Yes, and now I'll tell you in a very few words how we came by the marked money. The man called Garnar, which is merely an assumed cognomen, is really named Reid Oakburn, and he is John Oakburn's son by a first wife, Marion is the child of a second marriage, and his half-sister. Reid is really much older than he looks. Years ago I knew him well in Kansas City, where he resided for some time. There he forged a note, and for the job he served a term of imprisonment. He came out of prison a desperate, reckless man, but he had resolved to live an honest life and bury the past, so he has told me. He is now in Kansas City, where he is noted for his name, assuming the alias William Hempsted, and he went to Denver. There he succeeded in working himself into a situation in a bank, and finally he became cashier."

Pratt paused for a moment.

Paxton had started when he mentioned the name William Hempsted, for he knew that was the name of an absconding Denver bank cashier, for whose capture there was a standing reward of \$10,000. From a Denver detective agency Paxton had received a description of "Hempsted," but it did not correspond with that of the suspected man.

"When Reid Oakburn, or Hempsted, or Garnar—the latter his latest alias, became cashier of the bank, and he had the handling of the funds, he fled with a large sum which he squandered in gambling. When he left Denver he assumed a clever disguise, and as he soon after received a severe cut across the eyebrow which left a severe scar, his disguise was perfect."

"Fate directed Reid Oakburn to come to this city under the name of 'Garnar.' I met him on the street on the afternoon preceding the night of John Oakburn's death, and I recognized him, or fancied that I did, calling him by name, and the result proved that I was not mistaken."

"A reward of \$5,000 had been offered for his capture, and I meant to have the money. Pretending friendship, I deceived Reid Oakburn to my office, where he made him prisoners in the private apartment, intending to turn him over to the officers of the law."

"But while Weeks and myself were considering the matter there was an arrival in the office. Levi Kredge, who was acting as a spy for us at Garrison's office, came in and reported that Oakburn was going to cash a check at the bank for \$78,000, and that the money was to be paid to us in the morning."

"This occurred to me, and I wanted to get Garrison in my power. That money would save him. I knew that old Oakburn loved his wayward first-born son better than his own life, and I determined that that old cashier should ransom Reid. And he, the \$78,000 intended to save Garrison from ruin should be the price of the fugitive cashier's liberation by us."

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